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National Intelligence Production
Generation

Role of the National Intelligence Officers (NIO)

One basic reason for the establishment of the NIOs was to develop a mechanism which could help the Director of Central Intelligence respond to the President's charge to take a more positive role in leading the Intelligence Community. Specifically, the DCI was tasked with improving (among other things) "the responsiveness of the US intelligence effort with respect to national requirements" and with improving "the quality, scope and timeliness of the Community's product." The NIOs, as the DCI's principal substantive staff officers, represent a mechanism through which the attention and resources of the Community elements can be focused on geographic or functional problems of major policy concern.

The NIOs are responsible for maintaining close contact and continuing dialogue with policy-level customers on the National Security Council (NSC), its staff and ancillary committees, and with senior subordinates in the departments whose heads are members of the NSC. Through these contacts, the NIOs are kept abreast of policy makers' needs for national intelligence and serve as a conduit relaying these needs and concerns to specialists throughout the Community,

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whatever their affiliation within the Community or its several components, to provide a means for energizing and focusing all of the Community's knowledge and expertise on the specific problems at hand. This involves considerations of what^{has}/to be collected, analyzed and produced to meet the needs of the national-level customer.

The "production of national intelligence" in this context, however, has a definite specialized meaning, since the actual work on most of the papers is done by officers and analysts throughout the Community under the overall supervision of an NIO. Under the DCI's concept for the NIOs, an NIO is envisaged as a channel of communication and a coordinator and manager of national intelligence production rather than a drafter of intelligence reports. Indeed, a major objective of the NIO system is to draw on the best talent available throughout the Community in producing national intelligence products designed to be timely, directly responsive to and in support of key decision makers at the policy level.

Requirements for National Production

The driving force in the whole cycle of production of national intelligence is the substantive guidance contained in the DCI's Perspectives for the Intelligence

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Community, the DCI's Substantive Objectives, and the Key Intelligence Questions for the fiscal year. These documents narrow the goals of the Intelligence Community from the general five-year view of the world as reflected in the Perspectives down to the more specific though still broad Substantive Objectives for the fiscal year to the more detailed Key Intelligence Questions, which by definition flag topics of major importance with a direct bearing on policy decisions that may have to be made during the coming year. While these documents are prepared by the Intelligence Community, they are reviewed and approved by policy-level echelons -- e.g., the National Security Council Intelligence Committee -- to ensure they reflect the needs of the policy makers.

In the main, the bulk of national intelligence produced under the auspices of the NIOs is in support of the Objectives and KIQs, though much of it results from specific requests from key policy makers or their staffs. These requests may come because of these policy officials' awareness of a developing problem or concern about a continuing one; or they may come from the other direction, i.e., through the identification by an NIO or other member of the Intelligence Community of a policy matter over the

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horizon which will need high level attention. The requests may be in written form, they are often levied orally -- by phone or in face-to-face conversation -- during the course of the continuing dialogue between the NIOs and senior consumers. Some requests for national intelligence, of course, are initiated by members of the Intelligence Community and/or the NIOs, based on their expertise in their areas, but these products most often are contributory to answering larger intelligence questions.

The most common self-initiated NIO products are special memoranda addressing subjects which are known to be of interest to the policy makers or ones which bring to their attention items of particular concern. The Intelligence Alert Memorandum is a good example of such a report. It is designed to alert high level officials of a developing situation which could impact on US foreign policy interests and which may require policy decisions. Production requested by the Community is most frequently in the realm of Interagency Intelligence Memoranda -- a coordinated look at a specific, fairly broad subject. National level requests, of course, encompass Estimates (NIE, SNIE, NIAM) as well as special memoranda and Interagency Intelligence Memoranda. Taken as a whole, the majority of NIO production is in direct response to such requests.

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